

Carl Michael Bellman: Poet and Singer-Song-Writer of the 18th Century

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Abstract Carl Michael Bellman (1740 – 1795) was a poet and songwriter. As a young man during “The Age of Freedom” he took a very active part in Stockholm’s nightlife. As he was good at extemporizing a song or a poem, he became popular in the circles of pleasure-seeking young men in which he moved. During the 1760s he wrote drinking songs and Biblical travesties. He became much sought after and was asked to entertain not only at taverns but also in private homes. Bellman invented a parodic order, the *Bacchi Order*, in which he played the different roles himself. After this early period of apprenticeship he gradually developed the style that would yield *Fredman’s Epistles* (1790), the epitome of his works. The *Epistles* represent a unique mixture of opposites: crude jokes and sublime poetry, glimpses of Stockholm’s underworld and elevated scenes from classical mythology, the harsh conditions of the narrow streets of the Swedish capital and the pastoral life lived on its outskirts. Singing, drinking, and dancing are prominent themes in his work. This song cycle was followed by a song collection titled *Fredman’s Songs* (1791). During the 19th century Bellman’s reputation as a poet grew gradually. Today he is considered to be one of Sweden’s most prominent poets.

Key words poetry; songs; parody; musical parody; Biblical travesty; the 18th century

To present-day Swedes Carl Michael Bellman (1740 – 95) is the best known of all native poets from the 18th century. Virtually everybody is able to quote or sing one or two lines or even stanzas from his songs although it is more than 220 years since his two main collections —*Fredman’s Epistles* (1790) and *Fredman’s Songs* (1791) — were published. One important reason for his enduring popularity among ordinary people is that his poetry is set to music, another that his two main themes never go out of fashion: drinking and love-making.

Bellman grew up during the period known in Swedish history as the Age of Freedom (1714 – 1772), a period following the death of King Charles XII whose disastrous wars had devastated the country’s economy. Gone were the days of “greatness” of the Caroline era when Sweden was an important European player. Political power now devolved on the Four Estates: the nobility, the clergy, the burghers and the

peasants. There were two dominating parties: “the caps” and “the hats”, the former oriented towards Russia, the latter towards France. This was an era of political and financial turmoil but also one of pleasure and entertainment. Nightlife flourished. Like many other gentlemen of his age, the young Bellman relished Stockholm’s nocturnal delights.

Bellman was born and raised in Stockholm, Sweden’s capital, and lived there practically all his life except for spending one term as a student at Uppsala University. At the age of eighteen he began a not very prosperous career as a public servant. He would spend the nights at taverns with other young men, singing, drinking and gambling. It soon became apparent that he was a skilful improviser. As a result he became enormously popular among his friends, who appreciated his ability always to extemporize a song or a poem. Pre-eminent among the song genres that Bellman cultivated and his pleasure-seeking friends delighted in were the drinking song and the Biblical travesty.

Drinking Songs and Biblical Travesties

Bellman’s earliest drinking songs were written in the tradition inaugurated by earlier 17th-century poets like Runius, Holmström, and others. In turn, they were influenced by the style of the drinking songs popular among German students. But Bellman also took over traits from the French tradition. He knew French and he met Swedes who had been abroad and picked up popular songs; he also met Frenchmen in Stockholm — actors, artists, diplomats — and had several opportunities to listen to French songs.¹ He also learned how to use musical parody as a comic device. By taking a well-known tune and setting new words to it, a humorous effect could be achieved. The effect depended upon the listener’s awareness of the contrast between the original and the new lyrics. This technique was very popular among French *vau-deville* poets such as Vadé, Favart, and Collé. During these years Bellman also developed his own dramatic style of performance, resulting in him being characterized as a one-man-theatre. He sang, played, acted, and imitated all sorts of musical instrument and sounds. Wherever he performed he aroused the audience’s enthusiasm.

Serious songs based on a Biblical material had been sung in Sweden for a long time. When Bellman invented the Biblical travesty he introduced a new humorous genre. Brought up as a Christian and being the grandson of a dean, who was also Rector of St Mary’s Parish in Stockholm, he had been familiar with the stories of the Bible since early childhood. However, in his travesties he made exclusive use of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. Even today, Swedes of all ages are familiar with the song “Old Man Noah” who “rowed his boat ashore” and “bought himself some bottles”. The poet favoured the more frivolous episodes which he adapted in his songs, for example the story about Joachim in Babylon and his young wife Susanna, or the tale of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife.

The Bacchi Order

During the 18th century it became fashionable to belong to one or several fraternal Or-

ders. Every Order had its own ceremonial, symbols, decorations, and costumes. The most distinguished of these orders was that of the Freemasonry. Both King Gustav III and his brother Carl were freemasons. Being a member of a number of orders was expected of a man of important social standing. Always ready to stress the humorous aspects of any phenomenon, Bellman invented a parodic order, in which he played the different roles himself. Later on, when the gallery of personages had grown, he may have involved other actors to participate in the different chapters of the Bacchi Order. To be initiated one was supposed to have had at least twice been found lying in full view in the gutter. Even if the order was a fictional one, Bellman knew how to strengthen the humorous effect; he made famous Stockholm characters, known for their predilection for drinking, members of the Bacchi Order; brewers, innkeepers, and well-known drinkers. Stockholm was a small capital. It was common knowledge if a personal of some standing had fallen on evil times because of heavy drinking.

In 1769 a young nobleman and poet, Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna, attended a meeting at the home of one of Stockholm's burghers where Bellman held one of his parodic chapters. In his diary he wrote that Bellman "holds chapters at times, dubs knights in accordance with their merits, and last evening he delivered an oration to the memory of a deceased knight. Everything was set to verse with melodies from operas. He sings himself and plays the cittern."² The chapter Oxenstierna is referring to is about the dead Knight Lundholm, a well-known brandy distiller in Stockholm: "Öfver brännvins-brännaren Lundholm". Bellman's audience was familiar with the lyrical drama from which Bellman had borrowed the melody: Charles Favart's *Annette et Lubin*, performed at the Royal Opera in Stockholm fourteen times between 1763 and 1770. The musical parody is evident in this example; while the beauty and the fair skin of the fifteen-year old Annette is described in the lyrical drama, Bellman creates a burlesque contrast when describing the old drunkard Lundholm:

Thy morning sunburn'd seldom clear,
Thy high-noon was but dusk, I fear,
Thy nose a sunset hue did wear;
A purplish posy
Of cheeks blue and rosy
O'ershadow'd her.³

Oxenstierna was so overwhelmed by what he had seen and heard that he had difficulties sleeping the next few nights: "While I was lying in bed I suddenly burst into laughter".

Among the originals of Stockholm one character caught Bellman's eye very early on. Jean Fredman was the owner of a watchmaker's business which was so successful that he was elected Alderman of his guild. For some reason — maybe his unhappy marriage with an older widow — he started to drink heavily. Bellman knew about him since his childhood and now he witnessed the decline of the former Royal Watchmaker. A short time after Fredman's death in May 1767 Bellman wrote his first song about him, "Fredmans begravning", "Fredman's funeral". This was the start of a series of

songs with Fredman as protagonist.⁴

Fredman's Epistles: The Epitome of Bellman's Work

The years when Bellman wrote his drinking songs and Biblical travesties as well the songs of the Bacchi Order may be regarded as a period of apprenticeship. From 1767 and throughout the 1770s, he wrote a number of epistles. During the 1780s he was kept busy by other activities, but his poetic production started to grow again by the end of this decade. Bellman's original idea was to write one hundred epistles distributed in four parts, each comprising twenty-five epistles. The concept of the epistle was taken from the Bible. Whereas St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and the Galatians, Fredman addressed his epistles to the landlords of well-known taverns or to the brothers and sisters who frequented a certain inn on a regular basis: "To the faithful brothers at Terra Nova in Fork Alley" (*Fredman's Epistle* No. 5), "To the Mistress of the Cock Tavern" (*Fredman's Epistle* No. 67). Instead of God's word Fredman preaches the gospel of Bacchus, enjoining his congregation to love, drink and be merry. However, Bellman soon abandoned the idea. He may have found the arrangement too much of a constraint.

Fredman's Epistles is a collection of poems set to music. The scene is Stockholm among society's castaways. The story is loosely knit and coherent only to a certain extent. Each epistle is a separate episode. The earliest of the epistles "have a fantastically excited tempo, an insane impatience", in the words of Paul Britten Austin, Bellman's English translator and biographer.⁵ He makes another apt point regarding the epistle's combination of word and music:

Most ingeniously they are set to the music! Often not one, but two prosodies are involved — a musical and a verbal. Each is as it were superimposed upon the other, so that in the most surprising way the music can give rise to an entirely new dimension not to be found in the text alone, lending an aesthetic detachment or offsetting the verses' humour with undertones of unexpected melancholy. Even the melodies seem to be transformed and their purely musical significance heightened by Bellman's bold juxtaposition of musical, pictorial and verbal values. *Fredman's Epistles* make astonishing reading. To hear them sung, after only being familiar with them as verse, is like seeing the sun come out behind a stained-glass window.⁶

As new epistles were written, the gallery of figures kept growing. Fredman is joined by his female counterpart, Ulla Winblad, "Nymph and Priestess of the temple of Bacchus", as she is characterized in *Fredman's Epistles*. In real life Ulla's name was Maja-Stina Kiellström, a factory girl, known for her loose living. In the epistles she is dancing in the ballrooms or attending picnics in the pastoral environments outside Stockholm. Wherever she goes she is attractive to men, and Bellman is always ready to provide a glimpse of her physical apparition: her curly black hair, the clothes she is wearing, her posture and her swaying movements when dancing. Even though Bellman often stresses her dubious occupation — "Each day thou standest bride" — he

never moralizes.

Corporal Mollberg and Father Movitz are two other prominent characters. Mollberg is a dancing-master while Movitz is frequently depicted as an unsuccessful lover or as someone who gets beaten up. A couple of German names also occur, Jergen Puckel and Benjamin Schwalbe, an illustration of the strong German influence in Stockholm which goes back to the Middle Ages and the power of the Hansa. Quite a few of these figures play several musical instruments, providing Bellman with an excuse for including the imitations of musical instruments which are such a frequent feature of these songs. Initially, this had to do with Bellman's own performance and his ability to imitate.

One of his most beloved songs— it is still frequently sung — was written in 1773, *Epistle* No. 48, “Wherein is depicted Ulla Winblad's voyage home from Hessingen, in Lake Mälaren, one summer's morning, 1769”. Hessingen is an island east of Stockholm. Fredman, Ulla, her fiancé Norström, Movitz and others are sailing towards Stockholm. It is a beautiful morning. They pass well-known landmarks. Fredman observes and comments:

Now the sun gleams in the sky,
Mirror'd in the water;
Early breezes by and by
Fill the mains' l tauter.
On a hayboat, with an oar
Olle shoves off from the shore.
Who's that in the cabin door?
Kerstin, Skipper's daughter!

The landscape changes from pastoral to urban as they approach town:

Golden spires all early shine;
Cocks and crosses gleaming;
Rosy hues of dawn, so fine,
In the water seeming.
There a child upon the strand
Gathers pebbles in his hand
To bombard a feather'd band
Where they calm are swimming.

Agony, Disease and Death

Even if singing, drinking and dancing play an important role in the epistles they also contain themes of a more elegiac nature. One of the best-loved epistles is No. 23: “Which is a soliloquy, when Fredman lay in front of the Creep-in Tavern opposite the Bank Building, a summer night in the year 1769”. He suffers from a bad hangover. Tormented by his physical condition, he accuses his mother of thoughtlessness in be-

getting him.

Ah, tell me, mother, who then was it sent thee
 Just to my father's bed,
 Where thou alas the spark of life once lent me,
 I, poor slave of dread!
 But for thy flame
 I bear my pain,
 Wander full wearily.
 After thy fooling,
 Where thou layst cooling,
 Burn'd my blood in thee.
 Thou shouldst have padlock had to thy maidenhead;. . . flauto
 To thy maidenhead!

The rather drastic curses voiced in this epistle include his father, the bed where he was conceived, and even the carpenter who made it. After a while the shutters of the tavern open and Fredman is able to down the first dram of the day. This is the turning point. Slowly Fredman's spirits awaken and his outlook changes: "Thanks, father, mother too, thanks to both of you". The song ends with Fredman wishing he could meet his father and that they could get drunk together.

Stockholm was a small capital with vast social and hygienic problems. Drinking was widespread, not only among men but also among women and children. Although Stockholm had a population of only 70,000 people the number of taverns was extensive, about 700. Prostitution flourished. As a result, sexually transmitted diseases were common. Other infectious diseases spread easily too. There were only a few wells inside the town borders but the water was often infected and undrinkable. These are the conditions on which *Fredman's Epistles* are based.

Poor hygienic standards, poverty and an overcrowded city centre were other causes of infection. In one of the epistles the effect of tuberculosis is described: "To Father Movitz during his last sickness, consumption. Elegy" (*Epistle No. 30*).

Drain off thy glass! See death upon thee waiting.
 Sharpens his sword and peers in at the door.
 Be not afraid! He but essays the grating,
 Friend, to thy tomb; and grants thee one year more.
 Movitz, consumption is laying thee in the grave, man!
 'cello;. . . Pluck an octave, man!
 Tune thy sweet notes, sing life's fair spring of yore. :||:

Some of the classic symptoms of this, in many cases, lethal disease are described or touched upon; chronic cough ("Heavens, thou diest! Each cough with fear inspiring"), sweating ("Sweaty thy palm is"), fever ("small cheeks hotly burning"), and loss of weight ("Shrunken thy chest, and shoulders as of lath"). This rather

naturalistic representation rests partly upon the tradition of Bellman's poetic forerunners in the 17th century, among whom death is a regular topic. Death appears in allegorical shape with the scythe as an attribute.

Death is never far away in Bellman's poetry, not even when he is praising the pleasures of life. The thought of death often appears unexpectedly. For example, in the midst of a tumultuous ball, Fredman's awareness of death is suddenly revealed:

Hurrah, hear Ulla singing,
Fröja's temple loudly ringing;
Fiery darts see Cupid flinging.
Drunken I :||:
In Charon's ferry lie. (Fredman's Epistle No. 3)

In this example, the speaker's impending demise is briefly alluded to at the end of the epistle; in other poems the presence of death is much more manifest. In several epistles the setting is a churchyard and the subject matter a funeral. *Epistle* No. 54, "At Corporal Boman's grave in St. Katarina Churchyard", refers to begin with to the pastoral, but in a negative or reversed way: "Never an Iris upon these pallid fields / Pluck'd such humblest flower / As scent in shepherd's dwelling yields". In the following stanza the gloomy churchyard is described with its graves and crosses. It is late autumn. Every now and then Bellman makes use of contrasting techniques in his epistles; they start solemnly but end on a very different note. Such is the case of No. 54. As soon as the characters make their entry, the situation changes drastically. In the fourth stanza, the attention is drawn towards Boman's widow, Fredman and Movitz. She stands there sobbing by the grave while the two gentlemen propose a toast to her: "Skål Madam!"

Bellman himself was often asked to write poems on deceased people. Familiar with the conventions and the "high style" of this genre, he knew how to hint at his audience's consciousness of these conventions. The most important element of such poems was to celebrate the deceased person and to praise all his or her virtues. In the last stanza of *Epistle* No. 54 Fredman gives a much more straightforward opinion of the dead Boman, known for his short temper and willingness to fight:

Boman, I thank thee for ev'ry single day,
Both when thou embraced me
And when thou swore'st in the fray.

Eventually, Fredman turns to the widow with rather harsh advice:

Widow Boman, cease thy weeping, prithee!
Hear our Movitz' harp! No longer grieve thee,
And instead :||:
Chose another corp'ral to thy bed.

Bellman's Poetic Technique

Many attempts have been made to characterize the peculiar nature of the *Epistles*. The impressionistic qualities of Bellman's songs have frequently been stressed. Fredman reacts to and comments on the looks and actions of the other personages. Observing their behaviour, he makes brief remarks about individuals in the crowd, while conveying vivid impressions of the dancers' movements in the ballrooms, the whirling skirts and the sound of the heels clapping against the wooden floor. The impression is that the action takes place *here and now*. The *Epistles* are essentially dramatic. Most of the songs are written in the present tense so that everything seems to happen simultaneously. Without any clear reference to a specific person, different voices are heard from the noisy crowds of dancers and drinkers in the taverns of the Old Town of Stockholm or the dance halls of Gröna Lund, the entertainment district outside town.

In a short but influential study, Staffan Björck has pointed out that the specific character of the *Epistles* has to do with the role of the protagonist Fredman. First, it is important to emphasize the fundamental difference between Bellman, the cultivated poet, and his invention, Fredman, the ragged drunkard. Throughout the *Epistles*, Fredman serves as an energetic master of ceremonies. He makes exclamations, salutes people, asks questions, and gives orders: "Hi there, musicians, give vent to the waldhorn" (No. 4), "Play, Father Berg, in tears / Thy sorry pipe intone" (No. 12), "Servant, sir, Mollberg, what are you at?" (No. 45). Sometimes the dialogue between Fredman and somebody else also has a descriptive function:

Say, Father Berg, the devil confound her,
Who's that so fat, asquint at the counter?
The old girl as ever was in
Thermopolium? It's her, gadzoon! (No. 9)

Fredman seems anxious to give his listeners and readers as much information as possible without having to burden his poetry with long descriptions or narrations. Therefore, information about occurrences and settings is provided by the dialogue and Fredman's exclamations. Much of this information seems superfluous for the people within the fiction. He appears to address them but the information he gives is meant for us, his listeners or readers far away in time and space. Fredman combines the role of being the master of the party and the role of being a reporter who is referring in the present tense to what is happening in front of him. By means of this rather simple observation, Björck has to some extent identified the rather complex poetic nature of the *Epistles*.⁷

Bellman's Use of Roman Mythology

An important feature of the epistles is the mythological element. Mythology is such an integral feature of Bellman's style that it is impossible to imagine his poetry without it, as Nils Afzelius has remarked. Not one major classical device that Bellman recurrently makes use of is the attribute: Bacchus with his glass or barrel, Venus with her

shell, Triton with his trident. But Bellman has extended the poetic use of the attribute to comprise not only the world of the Roman gods but also that of ordinary people and everyday life. Certain professions are easy to identify because of a few distinct features. Bellman is always eager to make this connection between occupation and tool manifest in his poetry. The blacksmith is distinguished by his sledge, the soldier by his rifle, as in *Epistle* No. 48. Sometimes this device is used for humorous or even absurd purposes, as for instance when the turner is observed in the crowd of the ballroom and Fredman notices that he has brought his folding rule with him when dancing (No. 62).

Bellman provides a fusion of a realistic world of prostitutes and drunkards and a mythological world of Roman gods. Fredman and Ulla Winblad are momentarily transformed into Bacchus and Venus. An effect of double-exposure is achieved. When the poet was planning the two first parts of the epistles he attached great importance to the structure and order of the songs. Even if it was never realized, there are traits left of this original plan. *Epistles* 25 and 50 — the final poems of part one and part two respectively — are of outstanding grandeur. No. 25 describes Ulla's voyage across the harbour to Djurgården, the royal hunting ground east of Stockholm but also a place for entertainment, for dancing and drinking. To begin with, Venus/Ulla is carried up on the waves with a mythological suite of angels, tritons, dolphins, zephyrs and water nymphs hailing the goddess. When the party arrives at its destination the mythological apparatus is overshadowed by a more realistic and wanton series of events involving the personages of the poem. Ulla is transformed from goddess into a human woman. The magnificent mythological depiction might have been inspired by François Boucher's famous masterpiece *The Triumph of Venus* (1740). The painting was owned by the royal family and was on display at Drottningholm Castle in Bellman's time.

Epistle 50, the counterpart of No. 25, is titled "Concerning his last glimpse of Ulla Winblad, on her return from Djurgården". The impression of splendour is striking here too:

Phoebus enlivens
 The clouds in the heavens,
 With cities and havens
 He gladdens our eye.
 Stamping and snorting,
 His horses, cavorting,
 Are frisking and sporting
 And neigh to the sky.
 Stormclouds rumble
 Where thunderbolts tumble;
 Diana's shot bruises
 The oak-trees and spruces.
 'Mid lightning flashes
 E'en Jupiter dashes
 And royally splashes

‘Midst gods on high.

The original publishing plan was never realized but the place of some of the songs still suggests this original structure. Bellman had to wait until he was fifty years old to see his epistles in print.

Bellman and King Gustav III

In 1772 King Gustav III staged his successful “revolution” without spilling a drop of blood. Bellman wrote a song to honour the occasion, “Gustavs skål” (“Gustav’s toast”), which drew the King’s attention to the poet. Up to now Bellman had received a small salary from his post in the Administration of Customs. His wealthy friends had probably given him a helping hand once in a while, but throughout his life he lived beyond his means and was constantly in need of money. From 1775 on, he received an annual grant from the King who also appointed him Secretary of the newly founded State Lottery.

Bellman could call himself Royal Court Secretary. He had a regular income and was now able to marry Lovisa Grönlund, who was his junior by fifteen years. The marriage took place in 1777 and resulted in the birth of four boys. Lovisa Bellman outlived her husband by more than half a century, dying only in 1847.

In his early *Epistles* Bellman depicts the illustrious life of taverns and ballrooms. After being introduced at the Royal Court, he was more careful in his choice of subjects. Instead of the hasty mode made up of rapid impressions that he had used hitherto, the *Epistles* he wrote now became more epic. Nature now plays a more important role than before.

From the middle of the 1770s and through the 80s Bellman was from time to time asked to perform at the Royal Court. The King, Gustav III, was obsessed with the theatre. He wrote plays, he staged dramas, he even acted himself. Also Bellman was involved in his theatrical work, writing comedies and acting. He was not very successful as a dramatist but, on the other hand, his performance of certain comic stage characters was much appreciated. Bellman was also busy writing large numbers of occasional poems and patriotic verse. He was a member of several fraternal orders in which he was expected to produce verses. All these activities had a negative impact upon his production of epistles.

The Publication of Fredman’s Epistles

It seemed as if *Fredman’s Epistles* would never be published. Printing music sheets was expensive since every single page had to be engraved on copper. However, a new method was developed which made the procedure cheaper and less time-consuming. The music publisher who introduced the new method in Sweden decided to print the collection. Johan Henrik Kellgren, a distinguished poet and member of the newly founded Swedish Academy, was asked to write a preface, a frontispiece displaying the poet’s portrait was engraved by the artist Johan Fredrik Martin, one of Bellman’s friends. Kellgren’s participation is remarkable since he was considered as being one of the best poets of his time but also because he had made an attack on Bellman in

one of his poems. Obviously, he had modified his opinion. *Fredman's Epistles* was released on 16 October 1790. Bellman received a small pecuniary reward and eight copies.

When Bellman realized that his *Epistles* would at last be published, he became so enthusiastic and inspired that within a few months he wrote some of his most brilliant epistles. He had abandoned the plan of issuing one hundred pieces in one single volume. Instead, the collection comprises eighty-two poems. The work is rounded off with an epistle in which Fredman bids farewell to Ulla but also to life, No. 82, “or, An unexpected leave-taking, declared at Ulla Winblad’s breakfast on the greensward, a summer’s morning”.

A last time upon the greensward
A fond leave-taking I’ ll to thee afford,
Ulla! Farewell thy beauty:
Let ev’ry instrument resound.
Fredman sees in this minute,
His debt to nature at its limit;
Clotho has done her duty,
A button snipt for Charon to impound.
Let Love abound
All Fröja’s seed rewarding,
By Bacchus gown’d!
A last time upon this greensward
A bride was Ulla Winblad crown’d
Corno. . . A bride was Ulla crown’d.

As in many other of Bellman’s poems love, life and death are entwined. Venus’ Nordic counterpart, Fröja, is invoked, and the last words of the collection echo a phrase uttered in one of the early *Epistles*: “Each day thou standest bride” (No. 3).

Fredman’s Songs

When *Fredman’s Epistles* had been released there were still lots of songs good enough to be published. It was decided that another collection would be printed. *Fredman’s Songs* came out one year after the *Epistles*. This collection is much more varied when it comes to themes and styles. It comprises drinking songs, Biblical travesties and songs from the Bacchi Order. Some of the songs has been written in Bellman’s youth, while others were of more recent origin. Some of them are among Bellman’s most popular songs, for example No. 21, a drinking song which even today is frequently sung at dinner parties:

Away we trot, soon, ev’ryone
From this our noisy bacchanal,
When death calls out: “Good neighbour, come,
Thine hour-glass, friend, is full!”

Old fellow, let thy crutches be,
 Thou youngster, too, my law obey,
 The sweetest nymph who smiles on thee
 Shall take thine arm today.

Is the grave too deep? Then take a sip,
 Raise the brimming goblet to thy lip!
 Yet a sip! Ditto one, ditto two, ditto three...
 Then die contentedly.

Bellman constantly paid poetic tributes to Gustav III. Since Sweden was at war with Russia he produced patriotic poetry celebrating Gustav III as a successful master of war even if he was not. However, one of the poet's most inspired royal tributes is the peaceful song titled "Haga", *Fredman's Song* No. 64. Everything seems to indicate that it was written in 1791. Haga is the name of the King's favourite building project. Gustav III had a vision of making a Nordic Versailles but the plan was never finished. But Bellman's song was completed and it has been sung ever since:

O'er the misty park of Haga
 In the frosty morning air
 To her green and fragile dwelling
 Se the butterfly repair;
 E'en the least of tiny creatures,
 By the sun and zephyrs warm'd,
 Wakes to new and solemn raptures
 In a bed of flowers form'd.
 [...]
 How delightful 'tis to savour
 Within a park so rare,
 Both a royal monarch's favour
 And the greetings of the fair!
 Ev'ry glance his eye dispenses
 Asks of gratitude a tear;
 E'en the sullen in his sorrow
 Must at Haga find new cheer.

Bellman's Last Years and His Posthumous Reputation

Carl Michael Bellman died in 1795 at the age of fifty-five. During the immediately preceding years everything had been going downhill. Bellman had contracted tuberculosis, had been arrested for debt, and had to spend the winter of 1794 in the Palace guardhouse. As a courtier, he did not have to go to an ordinary prison. The winter that year was severe, and the room where he was incarcerated was cold and damp. It was a broken man who was released in June 1794. He died the following winter.

Throughout the following century, Bellman's fame grew constantly. In 1829 a monument was erected in his honour. This was the first time such a tribute was paid to a Swedish citizen who did not have a religious or royal affiliation. Bellman's works, especially *Fredman's Epistles*, were adapted for other arts and media. His songs were performed by male quartets and choirs in the university towns of Uppsala and Lund. Fredman plays were staged and performed in Stockholm and/or they were played across the country by travelling theatrical companies. Artists used Bellman's works as a source for their paintings and prints. Bellman was used even as a trademark; Bellman's punch and Bellman's tobacco. His themes and style were recurrently used by other poets in order to create a certain Bellmanesque atmosphere.

Since lovemaking and alcohol — Venus and Bacchus — are common topics in Bellman's poetry, the frankness of the 18th century posed a problem for the bigoted 19th century. The indelicate songs were restricted to the male coteries. According to the morals of the time, women should be protected from crude manners and coarse jokes.

During the 20th century Bellman's reputation has steadily grown. The number of languages into which his poetry has been translated is continuously increasing. According to the home page of The Bellman Society, approximately 4,000 interpretations in 20 languages have been made. Bellman's life and songs have also been made the subject of adaptations in the form of films, television series, and musicals.

Notes

1. Nils Afzelius, "Carl Michael Bellman", *Ny illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria II*. Ed. E. N. Tigerstedt (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1967) 259.
2. Quoted from Paul Britten Austin, *The Life and Songs of Carl Michael Bellman*. Genius of the Swedish Rococo (Malmö: Allhem Publishers, 1967) 42. All translations of Bellman's work into English in this article are made by Paul Britten Austin. Quotations in English of Bellman's poetry are taken from Paul Britten Austin's translations: *Fredman's Epistles & Songs. A Selection in English with A Short Introduction by Paul Britten Austin*. Translated by Paul Britten Austin. Stockholm: Proprius Förlag AB/Unesco Publishing, 1990, 1999
3. This song was later published in the collection *Fredman's Songs*, 1791. 10
4. This song was later published in the collection *Fredman's Songs*, 1791. 28
5. Paul Britten Austin, *The Life and Songs of Carl Michael Bellman*. Genius of the Swedish Rococo (Malmö: Allhem Publishers, 1967) 62
6. Paul Britten Austin, *The Life and Songs of Carl Michael Bellman*. Genius of the Swedish Rococo (Malmö: Allhem Publishers, 1967) 63.
7. See Staffan Björck, "Fredman som conférencier. En synpunkt på Bellmans konstnärsskap", *Kring Bellman*. Ed. Lars – Göran Eriksson. (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1964) 47 – 60

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